

American people any near-term crisis while definitively resolving the majority's excuse that they lacked time to address the debt limit through the 304 reconciliation process. Now there will be no question; they will have plenty of time.

Or, if our colleagues would instead prefer a more traditional bipartisan discussion around basic governance, they can stop trying to ram through yet another reckless taxing-and-spending spree that would hurt families and help China. That would be the path toward that kind of discussion.

#### GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on a related matter, Washington Democrats are behind closed doors trying to hammer out a multitrillion-dollar reckless taxing-and-spending spree, but we already know a lot about this bill.

First and foremost, we know their reckless legislation would hurt American families and actually help China. It is that simple: inflicting pain on American workers and families while putting us at a global disadvantage.

Just look at the radical climate policies Democrats have packed into the spree to satisfy their far-left base. The apples haven't fallen far from the awful Green New Deal. In the name of clean energy performance, Democrats want to force electric utilities to model their grids off of the high-cost, black-out-prone system that liberals have set up in the State of California; move all 50 States' electric grids toward California's.

As one group of major power providers observed, not only would this be logistically unworkable, it would also threaten to send consumers' electricity costs totally out of control. And in the words of a member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission who testified before our colleagues just last week, the scheme would be "H-bomb"—"H-bomb"—for the electricity markets.

At the same time, Democrats are also pushing a brand-new natural gas tax they call a methane fee. It is a natural gas tax is what it is. Just as our friends in Europe are facing soaring natural gas costs and the threat of winter shortages, just as it seems Russia may be willingly supplying less and less gas to the free world, Democrats want our Nation to declare war on natural gas, kill tens of thousands of jobs, drain billions from the economy, and increase costs for our families—at a moment when U.S. natural gas futures just hit a 12-year high.

There is no limit to the harm Democrats will inflict on America to force the heartland to accept elite liberal fashions. Their legislation includes special giveaways for electric cars that are disproportionately the preferred option—you guessed it—of wealthy people, jacking up America's gas bills and utility prices in order to turn 49 other States into California. It is a bad

idea at an awful time and just one more way their reckless taxing-and-spending spree would hurt families and help China.

#### FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now, on a related matter, while Americans contend with Democrats' self-created border crisis and inflation crisis, our foreign policy is in crisis as well.

The Biden administration's disastrous retreat from Afghanistan may be over, but the danger to the American citizens and Afghan partners it left behind certainly is not over. Around the world, adversaries and allies alike are drawing new conclusions from President Biden's Afghanistan disaster about America's will to defend our allies and our interests.

Pyeongyang is putting on another master class in how despots disdain the so-called rules-based international order. Literally, while a North Korean official was haranguing the U.N. in a speech about the "consequences it will bring in the future in case it tries to encroach upon [its] sovereignty," the Kim regime punctuated the speech with yet another provocative round of U.N. sanctions-violating ballistic missile tests.

Iranian disregard for international norms and the Biden administration's efforts to enforce them continues apace. Tehran is ramping up its nuclear activities, demanding bribes to even return to the negotiating table, as well as stepping up its use of terrorist proxies to threaten its adversaries all across the region.

In light of our retreat from Afghanistan, we should not be surprised if Iranian-backed groups redouble their efforts to inflict U.S. casualties and otherwise pressure the Biden administration to turn tail and run from Syria and Iraq.

When it comes to near-peer competitors like Russia, the Biden campaign's tough talk has been replaced by the Biden administration's desperate rhetoric of diplomacy. Putin is unfazed and undeterred.

Repression at home, manipulation of energy markets abroad, military modernization, cyber mischief—this doesn't exactly scream ready for good-faith engagement.

Most of all, the administration's hollow rhetoric has done nothing to deter the growing threat from communist China. Just this month, Beijing has sent a record number of military aircraft on provocative missions into Taiwan's airspace. As senior Pentagon officials have warned, "we are witnessing a strategic breakout" by China, Democrats still refuse to let us adequately fund our own military and defense.

The Biden administration's budget falls woefully short of our requirements for greater competition with China and with Russia—all the more so given the inevitable growing terror threat. And here in Congress, Demo-

crats are doubling down on this reckless misstep. Democrats want to spend trillions of dollars on a socialist wish list at home while leaving the service-members who keep us safe overseas in the lurch.

Now, I don't expect Chairman SANDERS or certain radicals in the House to be keen on using reconciliation to fund our military—hardly. But Senate Democrats have left Congress's most fundamental tool for influencing defense policy—the historically bipartisan NDAA—in procedural limbo literally for months.

The Democratic leader's latest public statement on his caucus's spending priorities did not even mention the defense authorization bill. Apparently, he is content to let it languish behind their leftwing wish list.

So, Madam President, America is staring down serious and historic threats. And somehow, with unified control of government, the only actions Democrats have managed to take on foreign policy have made them worse.

The American people deserve a lot better than this. Our servicemembers deserve better. Our allies deserve better. But Washington Democrats are proving they cannot deliver.

#### TRIBUTE TO MEGAN MERCER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on one final matter, it is a small group of people who become familiar faces right here on the floor of the U.S. Senate. There are the Senators themselves, the nonpartisan professionals on the dais, the Capitol Police, and doorkeepers.

And then, Madam President, you have the men and women of each party's cloakroom. These small and tight-knit teams keep information flowing from the Senate floor to Members' offices and vice versa. They track legislation and amendments. They negotiate procedure across the aisle. And in a thousand other duties, they all add up to tense days, late nights, and a truly front-row seat to Congress.

For the last decade, one of those special few has been a daughter of Kentucky and an alumna of my own office: Megan Mercer.

Megan's Senate story started about 15 years ago, when she spent a summer as a page. Before long, this impressive young woman took an internship in my personal office, serving Kentucky; then an entry-level position in my leadership office here in the Capitol; and then Megan came here to the floor, to the Republican cloakroom.

A decade ago now, she took a seat behind their big desk. She answered phones. She answered questions. She learned the ropes. And over 10 years, she worked her way up to a key role of senior floor assistant.

Pick any important vote, and Megan has been right here in the well, at this table, tallying the count for our side. She has cleared legislation and consent

requests. She has negotiated with Democrat counterparts on a daily basis.

Through it all, Megan's colleagues have come to admire her patience, level-headedness, and the institutional knowledge she has built up; and so have we Senators.

Fortunately, the work has not been thankless. I remember Megan was especially thrilled when Senator Lamar Alexander made sure that Megan's help with the Music Modernization Act yielded a signed "thank you" note from Dolly Parton—one of her all-time favorites.

So as we, unfortunately, prepare for Megan's upcoming departure from the Senate, I want to thank her for her fine public service. Megan has made her native Kentucky proud; she has made her parents Dr. Albert and Robin Mercer very proud; and she has made me proud as well.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak as if in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ELECTIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, today, the Senate Judiciary Committee released a report after an investigation of the circumstances surrounding Donald Trump's efforts to take over the Justice Department during the closing days of the last calendar year and beginning of this year.

Since January, the Committee has investigated reports that White House officials, including the President himself, pressed the Department of Justice to support President Trump's unsubstantiated bids to overturn the 2020 election results, and that Acting Civil Division Assistant AG Jeffrey Clark aided in that effort.

Today's interim staff report sheds new light on former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election. Jeffrey Clark became Donald Trump's Big Lie lawyer, pressuring his colleagues in the Department of Justice to force an overturn of the 2020 election.

Let me put this in perspective. The election was in November. The results were announced. Most of the world accepted it, but the former President, Donald Trump, never did. He filed a succession of lawsuits to prove that the election had been stolen. He failed in every effort in court. That was stage one.

Having failed in court with some of the most outlandish theories imag-

inable, but considered normal for the likes of Rudy Giuliani, they went into the second phase. The second phase was to coerce the Department of Justice and the Attorney General to intervene in the election results and to reach out directly, as the President did himself personally, to the election officials in States where he thought he should have won but he didn't.

So all that effort was under way when William Barr, President Trump's Attorney General at the time, issued a statement saying there was no evidence of widespread fraud in the election. That was disappointing to the President.

It occurred that in the middle of December of last year, William Barr, the Attorney General, announced that he was going to resign as of December 23. A man was chosen as the Acting Attorney General, Jeffrey Rosen, and Richard Donoghue as Deputy Attorney General.

There was a full court press on at that time by President Trump and his supporters to influence Jeffrey Rosen into intervening into this election contest. When I say "full court press," I am talking about repeated telephone calls and meetings in the White House over a period of 2 weeks.

This report, which we have brought to the attention of the public, as well as members of the Committee, obviously, went into detail as to what happened during that 2-week period of time. It was an incredible moment, which most Americans didn't even know was going on. We were a half step away from a full-blown constitutional crisis because what the President was trying to do was to convince the Attorney General to contact the leaders in the States where he thought—the President thought he had won the election and to tell them to not certify the results and to pick an alternative set of electors in some instances.

In each of these cases, the President was—President Trump—pushing a theory on why he actually won. These theories went from crazy to silly, to outlandish.

Let me give you one of them. It was called Italy-gate. I hope you caught this one because, naturally, Rudy Giuliani was somehow involved with this—some notion that Italian satellites were intercepting the voting machines in America and changing the results against Donald Trump. That is the nature of things.

In the State of Georgia, the President and his supporters were arguing that they have videotapes proving that people brought in suitcases full of ballots, and they showed these videotapes. The election officials in Georgia—which, I might add, all Republican—countered that by saying that those were actual containers of ballots and that was the ordinary process; there was nothing sinister going on there.

State after State, case after case, Trump was making the argument that he was cheated out of the election—

which, of course, was false, but he still believes it to this day—and putting the pressure on Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen to be complicit in this plot. He even asked him to consider filing a special case in the Supreme Court across the street to stop the election results from being certified.

Our report shows that Jeffrey Rosen and his Deputy, Richard Donoghue, resisted this from the start. Jeffrey Clark, another Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Division who had nothing, literally, to do with this matter on a legal basis, were in conflict from that point—Clark, on the side of Trump, saying that the letters to the States should be issued, and Rosen and Donoghue arguing that there was no basis in fact, no proof of election fraud that could warrant that kind of unprecedented action.

In the meantime, many other players, like Mark Meadows in the White House, were also pressuring the Department of Justice. The net result of it was a fateful day—I believe it was January 3 of this year—when the President called Rosen, Donoghue, and Clark to the White House to pursue his effort to replace Rosen with Clark, a more complicit person in the process.

At that moment, two things happened that were significant. The White House Counsel, Pat Cipollone, dissented from the President's position and said it was a murder-suicide pact for him to engage in this. Secondly, at that point, the eight leading officials in the Department of Justice all said that they would resign en masse if there was a replacement of the Acting Attorney General by Mr. Clark.

The President hesitated and decided at the very last minute not to pursue that course, not to replace him. That was significant, I will tell you, because had it happened otherwise, there would have been a possibility that there would have been a contest on the election results.

What did the President do next after deciding that? Well, just for good measure, he ended up forcing the resignation of the U.S. attorney in Georgia who refused to buy his outlandish claims. It was the President's way of protesting that particular U.S. attorney's—Mr. Cox—independence in the situation.

What followed? We know what followed. In a matter of 3 days, this President, former President, desperate in his situation, having failed in every court case, having failed to take over the Department of Justice, decided to take his cause to the streets. We saw it in the U.S. Capitol 3 days later on January 6. The President turned loose a mob—a mob that was supposed to stop us from counting the electoral votes and electoral ballots.

Most people say: Well, we heard most of this story before, so what is the point of it? The point of it is that we were so close to a constitutional crisis at that moment that it bears continued investigation and disclosure so the